



# Owatonna Fire Department

107 West Main Street  
Owatonna, Minnesota 55060-2913

Michael Johnson

Fire Chief  
Phone (507) 444-2454

## OUTDOOR COOKING

Each year, gas-fueled and charcoal grills are involved in thousands of home structure fires and home outdoor fires, according to the National Fire Protection Association. Selecting a safe location for your outdoor grilling is important. Almost half of all home structure charcoal grill fires and one-third of the gas grill fires began on an exterior balcony, or unenclosed porch. For this reason it is important to place your grill in a safe location to prevent fires. Many of the materials used in construction today can ignite easily when the heat from the grill ignites combustible materials around the grill.



Homeowners need to think about fire safety. Consider the fire hazard created from the heat of the grill before using a grill on a deck, exterior balcony or unenclosed porch. Pick a safe location for your grill away from any combustible material.

The use and storage of solid fuel or propane cooking equipment on patios and balconies has results in a number of fires each year. Fire departments respond to an average of 7,900 home fires involving grills, hibachis or barbecues each year, including 5,000 outside fires and 2,900 structure fires. In 2007, 18,600 patients went to emergency rooms because of injuries involving grills. [www.nfpa.org/education](http://www.nfpa.org/education)

### Gas vs. Solid-Fueled Grills

Four-fifths (81%) of the grills were fueled by gas and 16% used charcoal or other solid fuel.

Gas grills were involved in 6,400 home fires, including 2,100 structure fires and 4,300 outdoor fires.

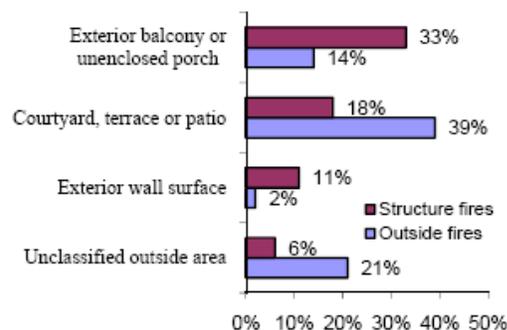
- > Leak or break was the leading factor contributing to gas grill fires.

Charcoal or other solid-fueled grills were involved in 1,300 home fires, including 600 structure fires and 600 outside fires.

- > The leading cause was something that could burn being too close to the grill.

Although gas grills are used roughly 1.5 times as often as charcoal grills, they were involved in five times as many fires.

### Home Grill Fires by Leading Areas of Origin 2003-2006



### SAFETY TIPS

- Propane and charcoal BBQ grills should only be used outdoors.
- The grill should be placed well away from the home, deck railings and out from under eaves and overhanging branches.
- Keep children and pets away from the grill area.
- Keep your grill clean by removing grease or fat buildup from the grills and in trays below the grill.
- Never leave your grill unattended.
- Keep children and pets away from the grill area: declare a three-foot "kid-free zone" around the grill.
- Always keep water spray bottle close at hand that can mist a fire in case of a sudden flare up, even if you are using a propane gas grill.
- Periodically remove grease or fat buildup in trays below grill so it cannot be ignited by a hot grill.
- Put out several long-handled grilling tools to give the chef plenty of clearance from heat and flames when flipping burgers.

**Propane Grills:**

- Use only equipment bearing the mark of an independent testing laboratory. Follow the manufacturers' instructions on set up and maintenance.
- If you use a propane gas grill, be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions on proper maintenance and how to check for leaks.
- Check the gas cylinder hose for leaks before using it for the first time each year. A light soap and water solution applied to the hose will quickly reveal escaping propane by releasing bubbles. If you determine your grill has a gas leak, by smell or the soapy bubble test, and there is no flame turn off the gas tank and grill. If the leak stops, get the grill serviced by a professional before using it again. If the leak does not stop, call the fire department.
- If you smell gas while cooking, immediately get away from the grill and call the fire department. Do not attempt to move the grill.
- You can use your gas grill all year round, but if you choose not to in the winter there are a few options for safely ending your grilling season. If you remove the propane tank, make sure it is properly plugged and stored away from the living areas. Never store propane gas cylinders in buildings or garages. If you store a gas grill inside during the winter, disconnect the cylinder and leave it outside.

**Charcoal Grills:**

- Stack charcoal in a pyramid at the center of the grill.
- Purchase the proper starter fluid and store the can out of reach of children, and away from heat sources.
- Never use any flammable or combustible liquid other than charcoal starter fluid to get the fire going. The chemical's contact with heat can cause a flare-up and the potential for severe burns. Kerosene, gasoline or other petrochemicals are highly volatile and create toxic fumes. In addition, these chemicals can penetrate the food and are poisonous if ingested.
- Never add charcoal starter fluid when coals or kindling have already been ignited
- Once coals have soaked in the lighter fluid (approximately 1 minute), throw a lighted match in the center or use a long fireplace match. Never use a cigarette lighter to start either charcoal or a campfire. After the coals have become covered with ash (approximately 1/2 hour) use a long handled non-flammable poker to spread them out evenly. They are now ready for cooking. Replace food rack and begin.
- When finished, douse a charcoal grill or campfire with water and close the grill vents. Smother an open campfire with sand or dirt. Allow the coals to cool overnight and dispose of coals and embers properly, preferably in a non-flammable container.
- Never burn charcoal indoors or in a tent - lethal concentrations of carbon monoxide could build up.

If you have further questions please contact the Owatonna Fire Department at 444-2454.

Safety starts with you!

Sincerely,

*Michael Johnson*

FIRE CHIEF, CITY OF OWATONNA

Codes and Restrictions:

**Single Family Dwellings:** The Fire Code and the City of Owatonna Minimum Housing Code does not restrict the use of grills on decks of single family dwellings. Although, homeowners are encouraged to avoid using barbecue grills in areas on decks, unenclosed porch areas and balconies or when the heat of the grill can ignite combustibles around the grill. Fire Safety Statistics show this to be an unsafe practice.

**Structures containing three or more dwelling units:**

Minnesota State Fire Code

Appendix H Fires or Barbecues on Balconies or Patios:

- 1.1 Open Flame Prohibited. In any structure containing three or more dwelling units, no person shall kindle, maintain, or cause any fire or open flame on any balcony above ground level, or on any ground floor patio within 15 feet of a structure.
- 1.2 Fuel Storage Prohibited. No person shall store or use any fuel, barbecue, torch, or other similar heating or lighting chemical or device in the locations designated in Section 1.1.
- Exception: Listed electric or gas-fired barbecue grills that are permanently mounted and wired or plumbed to the building's gas supply or electrical system and that maintain a minimum clearance of 18 inches on all sides, unless listed for lesser clearances, may be installed on balconies and patios when approved by the chief.
- An option available to local jurisdictions that have not adopted Appendix H is to encourage apartment building owners to incorporate language into their leases that prohibits barbecue grills from being used or stored on balconies and patios.